

## [Mr. Edwin Punchard]

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Life History FOLKLORE - White Pioneer

Miss Effie Cowan, P. W.

McLennan County, Texas

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Interview with Mr. [??], White Pioneer, Siesel, Texas.

"I was around six years of age when my father, William Punchard, with his family moved [?] miles east of what is now the town of [?], Texas. That was in [?] I was born October 10, 1856 in Sempronius, Austin County, Texas, [?] a member of the 3rd set of children in my father's family. My [father?], William Punchard, was a New Englander, born and bred. He first [?] light of day at Francistown, New Hampshire, September 19, 1813. He [?] until 1878, he passed away near Riesel.

"In my father's [?] manhood, he was attracted to the South and went to the state of [Mississippi?]. In Madison County, Mississippi, he married Julia McGraw [?] were born the following children: Samuel, born September 6, 1836, [?] a farmer of McLennan County, and a Confederate soldier; Leonidas H., [?] February 15, 1838 was a soldier from Louisiana in the Confederate Army [?] died in that state leaving two children; William [?].,

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born January [?], 1840, he died young; Josephine born in the forties, married William [?] and died in Milam County, Texas.

Sometime after the [?] of his first wife, my father married Louisiana [?] in [?] County, Texas, and had children born in Texas before the territory [??] to the United States. His second wedding was celebrated November [?] 1844 and to them were born, Mary Punchard on August 16, 1845; Sidney [?] born January 24, 1847, who married John Bergland and died in Milam County [?] Texas; Cornelius E. born August 23, 1848; and Lucretia A., born [October ??], 1849 who became Mrs. [???] and died in Washington County. 2 "The third and last marriage of my father William Punchard was to Mrs. Elizabeth Aydelotte, of Fayetteville, Texas, February 27, 1855. She was born April 5, 1820 and died at Riesel, April 22, 1907. There were four children born to this union. James Hancock, who died in infancy; John H., born March 7, 1859, a business man and former of Mart; Julius W., who was born November 21, 1861 and who died while young; and myself.

"I began life with an education obtained in the public schools, at Chappell Hill College and at Baylor University, where I was under the personal influence of Dr. Rufus Burleson. Following the tradition of my family, I engaged in farming and gradually grew into the stock business, until it became one of my most important interests, and I also began buying land. When I gave up farming, it was to move to the town of Riesel, where I could give my children better opportunities in the schools. I then extended my interest in investments to that of stockholder in the Farmer's Gin Company of Riesel and in a similar concern at Mart, as well as in the Mart Cotton Oil Company. I became a stockholder in the Southern Union Life Insurance Company and Vice-president of the First State Bank of Riesel.

"I married in McLennan County, Texas, October 16, 1893, Mattie Gillespie a daughter of J. [?]. Gillespie who brought his family to Texas from Arkansas.

"We have had the following children: Edwin, who met accidental death at the age of sixteen; Herbert C., Louise and Lois. I have tried to help in the schools at Riesel and gave

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my time for some years as trustee. For my lodges, I belong to the Masons, Woodmen of the World and Moccabees. I am a member of the Methodist Church. In my relations with my fellow man I have tried to be helpful and public spirited. For the development of the Riesel territory I have taken a deep and abiding interest.

"When I first came to McLennan County, in 1872, this and adjacent counties were great cattle countries, thousands of cattle covered the fine black prairie land. It was not thought at the time that the prairie land would produce cotton, or was worth anything except for stock raising. I remember an incident about Jacob Weaver who was a very successful farmer of the Riesel community, and when the settlers commenced to put the black land in cultivation, he told some of his friends "they were doomed to failure and when they were satisfied to come back to the bottom and he would take care of them."

"However, Mr. Weaver found he was wrong and afterwards bought some of the black land west of Mart and erected a gin, and for years, he was one of the most successful ginnings of the black land section east of Riesel, now known as the Mart community. Later, a German by the name of Schlimbach came and bought large acreage of the prairie land to the southeast of Riesel and sold it off to German immigrants, many direct from Germany.

"When we lived in Austin County, my father was a merchant, plantation and slave owner. When the Civil War was over, he gave the slaves their freedom and they refused to leave, so he kept them and gave them part of the crop and their living expenses to stay and work the land. The carpet-baggers were in control and the times were pretty rough. It was pretty much the same as elsewhere in the days of reconstruction.

"[This?] reminds me of how when I was a boy we had to get our cotton to Brownsville during the war and send it through Mexico to the markets in Europe. From Brownsville and [?], Mexico, it was shipped across the 4 ocean. One could see, the long wagon trains of cotton, drawn by oxen, all through the fall of the year as they slowly mended their way to the Mexican border. The reason for this was that part of the time the Texas ports were

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blockaded and all the time enemies were on the watch to confiscate produce of any kind, and especially cotton, as it sold for fifty cents a pound or more, during the blockade.

“There would be from ten to twenty bales to the wagon and a train of wagons from ten to twenty in number. When they camped at night, they were drawn up in a circle to form a breastwork for defense from the robbers and Indians. These trips required from one to three months. If it was during rainy season, then they often had to camp by the creeks and rivers until they run down, for you must remember this was before the day of the bridge.

“My first impression of this country was the number (as I thought) of peach trees, I had never seen a mesquite tree before and as I glanced out the window of the car I thought the mesquite trees were peach trees.

“When we came here, there was no town of Riesel, the Waco Tap Railroad had recently been completed and the only two stops between Waco and Marlin were Perry and Harrison Switch. We lived over on Manos Creek, between Tehuscans and the Brazos River. Between Tehuscans and the Brazos there is a bend in the river and this is called Goat Neck. In this bend many of the first families lived.

“The families of General Harrison, Dr. Dunklin, Dr. Badwell, Johnson, Strange, Shakleford, Mullins, Gillespie, Billingsley and Oakes lived in the Brazos bottom, extending from the Harrison place, (now known as the Neal farm) on down the Brazos river almost to Marlin. To the east, there lived Dick Jones, Charley Turners, and many others. 5 “While we lived on Manos Creek, my father had a gin, store and sawmill. The cotton was brought to the gin from all up and down the river bottom, also to the saw mill came the timber for the logs to be made into lumber for the houses. The bottom was rich in many kinds of timber and as the land was being put in cultivations there was a good business for the saw mill, as well as the ginning. The prices fluctuated then, as now, from six to ten and twelve cents. When it was sent to the market it was loaded on the train at Harrison, Perry, Marlin or Waco, but

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most of the cotton was carried to Marlin and Waco and sold, then shipped to the market at Houston and Galveston.

"We all went to the little church called "New Hope", this was on the Dunklin plantation and the present negro church now stands on this site. At first, both denominations used it, but as I remember Dr. Carroll and General Harrison organized it first as the Baptist denomination. There is a little cemetery adjoining the church and many of the loved ones of the first families are buried in it. Many were the old time revivals held here and the people came from far and near.

"The bottom of the Brazos River was a hunter's paradise, the favorite hunting was the fox and deer. Pete Ross, a brother of Sul Ross was one of Texas governors. [?] Ross family lived about three miles from us. Our physician, Dr. Tripps lived where the Battle community is now. Doctor Bedwell and Dr. Dunklin also practiced in our community.

"Those were the days when the Brazos bottom was in its glory, plenty of everything to eat, wild turkeys, hogs and birds of all description, the bottom land was so rich that the crops grew almost without cultivating it. 6 "We were not far from the towns of Waco and Marlin and so we had the benefit of nearby trade. There were many old slaves who had come to Texas with their owners and who were still with them, so the labor question did not trouble us.

"As a whole, there was just about the usual amount of law breakers as in most sections of Texas. There was some cattle stealing, some murders, but then by the time we came here, the wildest days seemed to be about over. Many outlaws from other sections of [Texas?] trying to hide from the law found refuge in the Brazos bottom thickets that still were dense. And almost in every instance, these law breakers were caught, some after many years.

"There was a place across the Brazos River called Norwood. The men for whom the place was named was killed by a man named Sebastian. This Sebastain stole my horse to make

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his escape. It was a cold and rainy night in the winter and we kept hearing noises as if the horses in the little pasture back of the lot were frightened, but on going to look we found no one and so around ten or eleven o'clock that night our family retired, the next morning my fine saddle horse was gone. Some years later, we found a stray horse in [West?] Texas which proved to be my horse, however the man who found it in his pasture had had the strayed notice published some time before and the time had expired, so I lost the horse. Some years later, the murderer, Sebastian was caught and brought to the jail at Waco, he sent for me and told me of taking my horse to get away and how he waited under the bank of the creek bed waiting for the light in my house to go out before he took the horse, and how he thought we would never put it out.

"There were many amusing and interesting incidents connected with the courts of the early days in Waco and Marlin. It was in 1870 that there was a difference between the District Judge and the County Judge 7 which resulted in both courts for a time being thrown in jail. This happened between the reconstruction, Judge Oliver of the District Court, and Judge Leland of the County Court. Judge Oliver being a radical man demanded a large sheriff's force and Judge Leland refused to vote the expense of this force, whereupon Judge Oliver threw the entire county court into jail.

"The members of this court were prominent men and this so enraged their relatives and friends that a movement was started, headed by the younger men, to lynch Judge Oliver. Seeing this danger which he knew would terminate in a riot, Colonel Gurley went to the young men and told them that he would lead them if they would wait another day, in order to gain time to settle the matter peacefully by releasing the county court who were held as prisoners. He settled it in a clever way.

"One of the physicians of the city had expressed the opinion that the District Judge was insane. Very soon the physicians gathered and a declaration of the Judge's insanity was drawn up, and upon the basis of this document the imprisoned Judge and his county court issued a writ of lunacy. This was probably the only time in the history of the Union

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that both courts were in jail at the same time. This was just another instance of the reconstruction period. Very soon both courts decided to release each other and Colonel Gurley's strategy won for him the name of "Custodian of the Courts."

"As I recall the Judges of the Civil Courts, Judge Prendergast served from 1874 to 1876; Judge Saunders of Bell County, from 1876 to 1878; Judge Alexander of Waco from 1878 to 1882; Judge [?] until 1886; Judge Eugene Williams until 1889; Judge Dickinson until 1890. Then Judge Goodrich of Marlin served for a number of years. 8 "Another interesting incident of the early court days of Waco was that of the Thompson and the Blankinship families. Thompson had willed his slaves to a Dr. Johnson just before the Civil War and the will was contested, a sale ordered and on the day of the sale the two contestants got into a heated argument with friends of both sides taking part, which resulted in a shooting, but no one was killed and the ending of the war and freeing of the slaves were a factor in the ending of this case. However, afterwards in connection with this case, Colonel Gurley brought up a case of contempt of court orders, against one of the participants of the above mentioned case. Some of this man's friends threatened to shoot Col Gurley and came to court prepared. The Colonel was equal to the emergency and not wanting to be interrupted while asking his speech he laid two pistols on the table before him and one of his friends, with pistols, took a seat [??] back and faced the crowd. It ended with the speech being finished without interruption and the trial going on in peace.

"When we come to this county in 1872, the old Suspension Bridge at Waco, across the Brazos River had been completed in 1870. The cables were swung into position by George [?] and Trice Brothers, and J. W. Mann did the brick work, furnishing 2,700,000 brick. It cost \$130,000. For many years it was a toll bridge. In 1889, the city and county united to buy the bridge and make it free. When the bridge was thrown open it was said to be one of the biggest celebrations the county had ever been a witness to.

"It was in 1875, that the county decided to build a new court house at the corner of Second and Franklin Streets, the old court house was used until 1876, and then they rented

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Richey Hall and the old building was torn down. In 1877, the new court house (of that time) was completed and the 9 keys were turned over to the county judge. In 1886, the jail just back of it was built, then the new city hall took the site first occupied by the old Court House.

“The court house and jail which I have just mentioned was sufficient for the needs of the county until about the year 1899, then the agitation commenced for another and larger court house, jail and bridge over the Brazos, the old suspension bridge had been declared unsafe. At the time of the question of voting bonds for the court house, jail and bridge the County Judge was our present Judge of the court of Civil Appeals, Judge Gallagher. The commissioners were J. L. [?] of precinct #1; [?]. C. Cowan of precinct #2; [?]. C. [?] of precinct #3; and Mr. Montgomery of West, of precinct [?].

It is a matter that I call your attention to, of the death of H. [?]. Owen which was on the 25th day of February after he had attended the term of court only one day and was stricken in the court room with pneumonia and passed away in ten days. The question was being discussed at this time of a vote on bonds for the building of these three public additions to the counties improvement. Hence his ride through a blizzard in attempting to do his duty. This was in the horse and buggy days and the ride to Waco then took from three to four hours, a distance of twenty miles, it was this ride which caused his death. If I remember rightly there was no hospital in the city then and he was removed to a hotel next door where he remained until his death.

“The election was not held however for the voting of the bonds until the 28th day of April 1900, they carried and the new court house, jail and bridge were thrown open to the public in the year 1900 or 1902, I don't 10 remember which. The title to the land for the court house was accepted by the commissioners court October 19th, 1900. I took part in the laying of the corner stone of the court house at Fifth and Washington Streets, this was a great event. The [?] order was in charge of the ceremony. They had a big parade and I carried the banner in this parade. The foundation of the Court House was built of



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Texas granite from the granite fields of Burnet County. The old suspension bridge was condemned as being unsafe for traffic and later was reinforced by large cables, and is in use at the present time.

"Many changes have been made as time passes on, just recently the county has voted for a new jail to be built with the PWA funds provided by the government for public works. My brother John and myself were students at Baylor University under Dr. Rufus C. Burleson, and this was in the year 1873, I was just seventeen. It was then located at the corner of Fifth and Webster Streets, later it was moved to its present site at Fifth and [?] Streets. Donations did not come in as they do now, Dr. [Burleson?] staked his all in helping to keep Baylor's very existence, he went broke many a time, often without funds for himself or credit. He was a grand old man and Baylor owes its existence today to his loyalty and efforts. There have been many presidents since who have helped to make Baylor what it is, among them Dr. B. H. Carroll who was also a fine man."